

CHAPTER II

FLORIDA'S SIMPLIFIED ELIGIBILITY PROGRAM

The Florida Department of Children and Family Services (DCF) was the only grantee that selected a simplified eligibility model to increase elderly participation in the FSP for the elderly nutrition demonstration. Under the initiative, elderly residents from Leon and Gadsden Counties did not need to provide documentation for assets, earned income, and expenses. In addition, in-person eligibility interviews were waived for first-time applicants and those seniors who recertified for food stamps during the demonstration. DCF also instituted a consistent, year-long recertification period and a shorter application; however the short application was independent of the demonstration. While not technically part of the demonstration, a helpline operated by the community partner for low-income residents was advertised to program participants.

OPERATIONAL DETAILS

Mechanics of Services

The simplified eligibility program was available through the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) in Leon and Gadsden Counties. Seniors applying for food stamps in Leon County had to apply at the local office in Tallahassee, whereas all clients in Gadsden County were served by the Quincy office. Program officials made several modifications to FSP procedures, with the ultimate goal of making the food stamp application and recertification easier for seniors. Florida Impact, the community partner, operated a telephone helpline through which seniors could obtain information on the simplified eligibility program.

FSP Characteristics in the Absence of the Demonstration. DCF caseworkers¹ handle applicants for multiple social service programs, though offices are divided into adult units (60 years and older) and family units (under 60 years). Many applicants pick up a joint

¹ In Florida, DCF caseworkers are known as eligibility specialists.

application—known in Florida as a Request for Assistance—from the county office, but they also can request an application by mail or print one out electronically. The document is two pages long, including instructions and special notifications. The typeface is quite small and difficult to read.

Once DCF receives an application, a clerk makes an appointment for an eligibility interview, which is known locally as a “management review.” Walk-in applicants cannot be seen by a caseworker that same day. Seniors bring to the appointment their documentation of income, vehicle ownership, and assets. The latter is not required if the applicants receive Supplemental Security Income. To receive the relevant deductions, clients must provide documentation of expenses such as rent or utilities. Caseworkers either determine eligibility during that session or provide the senior with a list of the additional documentation that is needed. Seniors have 10 business days to submit the required paperwork by mail, fax, or in person.

During the in-person management review, the caseworker compares income and expenses over the past several months to assess the reasonableness of the information on the FSP application. If the caseworker rates the review as “good,” then the senior receives a certification period of one year. If expenses exceed income, the senior must participate in a management review after three months, and if it is satisfactory they then receive a six-month certification period. All recertifying clients automatically receive a form in the mail from the state office in Tallahassee to complete and return to DCF.²

On average, seniors make two trips to the local DCF office when applying for food stamps, or three or more trips if they must return with supplemental documentation. Staff in Leon County estimate that they spend one hour on the typical management review, and another 30 minutes to process paperwork prior to the demonstration. Gadsden caseworkers estimate that they spend between 60 and 75 minutes from start to finish.

Changes in FSP Policies and Procedures. Program officials made several changes to regular FSP procedures to make applying for food stamps easier for program participants, including that:

- Seniors did not have to submit documentation of income (e.g., earnings records, Social Security amounts, Supplementary Security Income amounts, and bank statements), deductions (e.g., medical bills, proof of shelter expense), and assets (e.g., ownership of vehicles). Applicants still were required to provide proof of citizenship. DCF verified the applicant’s Social Security Number, along with some income amounts (such as Social Security and Supplemental Security Income) using existing databases.

² During the second year of the demonstration, DCF instituted a toll-free statewide call center that allowed all FSP clients to call in and report changes in household income, expenses, or contact information in between recertification periods.

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- DCF waived the management review to determine eligibility, though caseworkers contacted applicants by telephone or mail if any relevant information was missing from the application or if clarification was needed.
 - All participating seniors received a year-long recertification period, as opposed to three or six months. Face-to-face interviews for recertifying seniors were waived; if necessary, information was clarified by telephone.
 - Clerks sent clients a letter acknowledging receipt of application. The application was then forwarded for eligibility determination to a caseworker, who flagged the client in the database. Applicants received a letter indicating the eligibility decision and benefit amount.
 - To facilitate the simplified eligibility demonstration, State officials developed a short, one-page application that only recorded data applicable to the elderly population.³ The one-page application was more user friendly, with larger typeface and bigger spaces for entering information. As was the case before the demonstration, applications could be obtained in person, by mail or fax, through a proxy. Again, demonstration clients could not apply for public assistance electronically.

Under the simplified eligibility system, caseworkers spent significantly less time processing each application. In Leon County, staff took 15 to 20 minutes on average to review, code, and enter an application in the DCF database. Staff at the Gadsden office reported that processing took 25 minutes or less.

Supplemental Services. Before the demonstration went into effect, Florida Impact sponsored a telephone helpline through which clients of all ages in Florida could access information and assistance in applying for food stamps. To supplement the call center, Florida Impact developed pre-screening software to indicate potential FSP eligibility. Caseworkers reported that, in informal crosschecks against the actual eligibility determinations, Florida Impact's software was 97 percent accurate. The helpline proved to be such a reliable resource that inexperienced DCF caseworkers often referred applicants to it for information about the FSP and to be prescreened.

Under the simplified eligibility program, outreach materials provided the telephone number to interested participants, encouraging them to call the helpline to get more information on the demonstration. When a call came in about the program, Florida Impact staff mailed the senior a packet that included the one-page application, a flyer describing the

³ Because the application was part of the application assistance model and not the simplified eligibility model, the state also used the shorter form in two comparison counties (Alachua and Jackson counties) but it did not change the eligibility rules in those counties.

simplified eligibility program, and a self-addressed envelope for either the Gadsden or Leon office.

Major Stakeholders and Roles

Within the Health and Human Services division, the Florida DCF served as the grantee for the elderly nutrition demonstration. It enlisted the involvement of the program's community partner, Florida Impact, to take responsibility for outreach efforts. Florida Impact is a statewide partnership of faith-based groups, community-based organizations, and service providers that advocates on behalf of low-income populations in the Florida Legislature. A handful of local non-profit agencies assisted Florida Impact with community outreach.

State officials from DCF took responsibility for planning and development, as well as overseeing operations and making policy decisions. The Economic Self-Sufficiency (ESS) Program Administrator, an Operations Review Specialist, and a Government Operations Consultant prepared the grant and conceptualized the program's design, with feedback from Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). In addition, the ESS Program Administrator elicited feedback from the county DCF administrators which the core planning group took into account. State officials developed and administered the training for local county staff and were responsible for preparing quarterly reports.

With the exception of outreach, local DCF offices operated the simplified eligibility program on a day-to-day basis. Five eligibility specialists handled demonstrations in Leon County. In Gadsden County, one senior eligibility specialist initially managed the cases for all participants but by year two, demonstration cases rotated between two specialists, due to an increase in the number of applications and staff changes within the office. The specialists continued to manage non-demonstration and non-FSP caseloads (for example, Medicaid). Two county administrators ensured that their staff followed appropriate procedures, while the district administrator oversaw operations in both counties and served as a liaison between the county offices and state officials in Tallahassee.

Florida Impact, under a contract with DCF, led outreach and publicity efforts, which were conducted by a part-time program coordinator. Its executive director spent 10 percent of her time contributing to quarterly reports and serving as the liaison with DCF. A few community-based organizations assisted with promoting the simplified eligibility program, including the Gadsden County Senior Citizens Center, America's Second Harvest, and Meals on Wheels.

Means of Communication and Related Issues

Staff faced moderate communication and program management challenges. Interview data suggest that some stakeholders—particularly caseworkers—at times felt that they were not kept informed about the demonstration's activities. Despite some communication from DCF prior to the start of the demonstration, local office staff felt that they were kept 'out of

the loop.’ Better efforts to communicate with local offices and attain their buy-in might have helped to increase their initial enthusiasm for the initiative.

Florida Impact did take steps to update the county staff. The program coordinator visited the local offices each month to notify them of upcoming outreach events, pass on any relevant information, and determine if they had any questions or concerns. These visits generally were informal, so it is possible that the supervisors and caseworkers were sometimes too busy to talk with the coordinator. It also may be that the local supervisors did not always pass on the information to their front-line workers.

Importantly, as the demonstration neared its end, some caseworkers reported not knowing when the demonstration was scheduled to end or how the transition would take effect. It was clear that they were surprised to learn that the simplified eligibility program was only a pilot. Other staff recalled receiving a letter from Florida Impact describing the end of the demonstration, as well as receiving a visit from the Florida Impact representative. (Some of them simply may have forgotten or might have been unable to attend that meeting.) However, it is telling that such a communiqué concerning a policy change came from an outside organization instead of from the agency’s headquarters, or at the very least the district and county supervisors.

Training

At the outset of the program, three state officials—the same group who developed the demonstration—conducted trainings for program administrators, caseworkers from both the adult and family units, and interview clerks from each participating DCF site. They held a total of six sessions at two sites in Leon County, and two sessions at the site in Gadsden County (two hours each). Approximately 150 staff attended the training, which covered an overview of the elderly nutrition demonstration and the new procedures for the simplified eligibility pilot. New staff received the same training as part of their pre-service training.

Florida Impact was not actively involved in the DCF training. Still, the organization ensured that its telephone helpline operators understood how to ‘screen out’ any FSP elderly clients who, after seeing a newspaper article or hearing a public service announcement, called to receive further information about the demonstration. Since the public service announcement did not specifically mention food stamps, sometimes current FSP clients called the hotline. In those situations, staff were instructed how to tell these seniors that they already had a “food card.”

Outreach Strategies

By its design, the fundamental characteristics of the simplified eligibility program were fairly straightforward, but educating the elderly population that DCF was making it easier for them to apply for food stamps became a critical component of the demonstration. Up until that point, DCF had not actively sponsored any outreach efforts for the elderly.

Core Themes and Target Audiences. In developing its outreach strategies, Florida Impact decided to employ buzzwords that stressed nutrition as opposed to “public assistance” or “food stamps.” From its past experience with needy populations, phrases that emphasized good health and healthy eating were believed to generate more interest. Furthermore, it incorporated “seniors” and “60+ years of age” instead of “elderly” because these expressions were believed to lend more dignity and respect to older age groups.

According to the Florida Impact program coordinator, community presentations initially were one of the most effective means of attracting seniors to the FSP, rather than posters or information cards. Traditional publicity methods might spark interest, but it was the one-on-one discussions that encouraged seniors to apply for food stamps. Delivering presentations to caregivers in particular (i.e., relatives, friends, or people responsible for the well-being of seniors) was crucial because generally these are the people who the elderly trust the most.

Public Education Activities. Florida Impact used a wide range of outreach methods throughout the demonstration, including dissemination of written materials (available in English and Spanish), a poster campaign on public busses in the Tallahassee metropolitan area, public service announcements, press events, and group presentations. Figure II.1 provides a detailed overview of these and other efforts (including those that took place in Alachua and Jackson counties).⁴ Some highlights from the public education campaign included:

- Florida Impact arranged press coverage for a promotional event at a senior apartment building in June 2002. The DCF Secretary explained the simplified eligibility program to about 10 residents, and the segment appeared on two news channels in both counties.
- The DCF Secretary taped a television public service announcement (PSA) that ran for a total of 12 weeks during three periods in 2003. In the segment, the Secretary described the demonstration and emphasized good nutrition instead of food stamps or public assistance, using phrases like “food card” and “food benefits.” The PSA also included footage of a senior using an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card. Because the local television stations reach multiple counties and even cross the state line in some instances, the PSA was not aired exclusively in the demonstration counties. Individuals who viewed the PSA could call the helpline (run by Florida Impact), where they were pre-screened for FSP benefits. If they lived in Leon or Gadsden counties, they could request

⁴ FNS instructed the grantee that these comparison sites should not receive any information cards or posters, but agreed to allow the DCF offices to use the simplified application—though not to follow the simplified eligibility rules. This took effect by July 1, 2002. However, the program coordinator continued to conduct group presentations on the FSP and set up tables at special events in these comparison counties.

the one-page FSP application; if they lived in other counties, they were referred to their local DCF office for further assistance.

- Promotional information cards were forwarded to Meals on Wheels (MOW) to be included in hot meal deliveries (every quarter in Leon County, less frequently in Gadsden due to fewer MOW participants).
- America's Second Harvest of the Big Bend (serving 14 counties) received information cards every other month to be distributed through its Brown Bags for the Elderly program at local senior centers and churches in Gadsden and Leon Counties.
- Florida Impact arranged for the Tallahassee transit system (TalTran) to display posters on its citywide bus routes for six months.
- The program coordinator routinely extended offers to deliver presentations about the demonstration. Several organizations invited Florida Impact to speak, either to providers, caregivers, or seniors themselves. These included Aging with Dignity (an advocacy group), senior housing complexes, the Leon County Extension Office, local area agencies on aging, the Capitol Coalition for the Aging, senior centers, the Emergency Care Help Organization, the Coalition for the Homeless, the Department of Neighborhood and Community Services, and representatives from various service providers and agencies on Community Service Day.
- Topics covered at presentations focused on the benefits of EBT cards and good nutrition for the elderly. However, they also stressed the value of food stamps, even for seniors qualifying only for the minimum benefit level. Program staff stressed that this translated into an extra \$120 a year. They also shared sample shopping orders that totaled \$10 or less (i.e., staples and easy-to-prepare dishes).

Stakeholders reported that high-profile publicity events tended to generate a wave of interest from applicants. For example, after Florida Impact sponsored a press conference in conjunction with the DCF undersecretary on World Food Day, the telephones 'rang off the hook' and the local county offices were forced to shut down the phone system for one day. In addition, a higher-than-usual volume of calls occurred after the airing of the first television PSA in the spring of 2003, requiring additional staff and volunteers at Florida Impact's call center. A supervisor from the Gadsden office reported that the PSA generated 100 applications during the first month that it aired, and approximately 75 percent of the seniors were eligible for food stamps. The program coordinator also remarked that the PSA was an effective way to reach seniors who lived in the rural regions, and seniors liked the idea of calling from the privacy of their own homes.

While Florida Impact implemented the public education campaign, DCF staff reminded those seniors up for recertification about the simplified eligibility program during their phone interviews. County offices also mailed letters in the fall of 2002 to elderly FSP clients

who were due to be recertified in the near future, describing the demonstration and explaining how the pilot would streamline the process.

Over the course of the demonstration, program staff distributed 14,180 applications, 14,426 information cards, and 268 posters through the mail or at presentations.⁵ Much of this material was mailed or was provided in person at dozens of community organizations that serve the elderly, which are listed in Table II.1.

Perceived Effectiveness of Outreach. Program officials did not include a tracking mechanism to determine how elderly applicants learned about the demonstration. To get a better sense of the demonstration's visibility in the communities, evaluators interviewed 11 service providers for the elderly to discover if they saw evidence of the program. Overall, the larger providers were aware of the demonstration, whereas the smaller affiliates of America's Second Harvest's Brown Bags for the Elderly program were not. For example, volunteers from three churches did not know about the pilot. Frequently, the grocery bags were reported to have contained various informational brochures, so it is possible that they packed the bags without reviewing the materials. In contrast, service providers who had been in their positions for several years and were active in their communities were very familiar with the demonstration and thought that Florida Impact effectively promoted the program among the elderly population and those who cared and advocated for them.

Staff Turnover

Considerable staff turnover in DCF offices across Florida coincided with the demonstration's implementation. Florida Impact reported that turnover at the Jennings Street service center in Leon County, where elderly cases are handled, was particularly high. To help introduce new caseworkers and supervisors to the simplified eligibility program, the program coordinator converted the slides from the training into note cards with bullet points highlighting the core rules and procedures of the demonstration. In contrast, staff turnover at the Gadsden County office in Quincy affected the family unit, but the adult unit remained fairly stable.

Major Operational Changes During the Demonstration

Program staff implemented few operational changes throughout the simplified eligibility pilot. Florida Impact redirected its emphasis on various outreach strategies, such as shifting from radio public service announcements and newspaper articles to more reliance on community presentations and word-of-mouth. It then focused on the television PSA during the second year. As the end of the demonstration approached, the central DCF office in Tallahassee mailed letters to all FSP elderly clients to remind them that the agency would revert to the previous recertification rules, effective January 1, 2004.

⁵ From the October to December 2003 quarterly report submitted by the Florida Department of Children and Families to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service.

Table II.1: Organizations and Service Providers That Received Outreach Materials, March 2002 to December 2003

Gadsden County	Leon County
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging and Adult Services • American Association of Retired Persons • Apalachicola Center for Mental Health • Big Bend Workforce • Capital Area Community Action Agency, Inc. • Carver Heights Senior Citizens Center • Catholic Social Services • Center for Independent Living of North Florida • Churches (several) • Continuum Personal Care Management • Food pantries (several) • Foster Grandparent Program • Gadsden Association Rehabilitation Center • Gadsden Community Hospital • Gadsden County Extension Office • Gadsden County Health Department • Gadsden County Public Library • Gadsden County Senior Citizens Council (AAA) • Gadsden County Senior Center • Green Thumb, Inc. (employment services) • HealthSouth Rehab Center • Helping Hands Foundation of Havana • Kiwanis Club • Meals on Wheels • NHC Healthcare • North Florida Panhandle Migrant Workers • Senior Companion Program • Shepherd's Hand Resource Center • Telephone Counseling and Referral Service • VISTA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging With Dignity (AAA) • Alliance for Aging Help Line • American Association of Retired Persons • America's Second Harvest of the Big Bend • American Red Cross • Bethel Towers • Big Bend Hospice • Big Bend Workforce • Capital Area Community Action Agency, Inc. • Casa Calderon Apartments • Catholic Social Services • Center for Independent Living of North Florida • Chaires Community Center • Continuum Personal Care Management • Dept. of Neighborhood and Community Services • Easter Seals Rehabilitation Center • Emergency Care Help Organization • Food pantries (several) • Foster Grandparent Program • Georgia Belle Apartments • Home Helpers (in-home companion care) • Home Instead Senior Care • The Homeless Shelter • Lake Ella Senior Living Facility • Leon County Extension Office • Leon County Health Department • Leon County Public Library • Leon County Senior Citizens Council (AAA) • Lincoln Neighborhood Center • Mabry Village Apartments • Meals on Wheels • Miccosukee Hill Apartments • Publix Supermarkets (11) • Salvation Army • Senior Companion Program • Simon Scott Senior Center • Smith-William's Service Center • Tallahassee Coalition for the Homeless • Tallahassee Community Hospital • Tallahassee Housing Authority • Tallahassee Memorial Health Care • Tallahassee Senior Center • Tallahassee Senior Coalition on Aging • VISTA

Source: 2002 and 2003 quarterly reports submitted by the Florida Department of Children and Families to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service.

DESIGNING THE DEMONSTRATION

Program Design

The designers of the simplified eligibility program in Florida hoped to increase enrollment of seniors in the FSP. This was viewed as particularly important, since Florida has one of the largest elderly populations in the United States. By making the process as simple as possible and eliminating the requirement to come to the DCF office, program officials hoped that the demonstration would eliminate some of the burden and stigma that seniors often associate with applying for food stamp benefits. The simplified rules applied only to those food stamp households in which all individuals are age 60 or older.

Who Was Involved and How It Unfolded. Florida Impact, a non-profit organization that lobbies members of the Florida Legislature on behalf of low-income populations, served as a community partner for the demonstration. DCF selected this group because it had collaborated on past projects with the agency and was familiar with its programs and operations. Moreover, according to state officials, Florida Impact had earned a reputation of being cooperative and service-oriented toward its clients.

After confirming the support and participation of Florida Impact, state and district level officials from DCF designed the demonstration model, with input from FNS. They spent approximately four months developing policies, procedures, and training materials, which included submitting a waiver request to USDA. They then created a draft version of a simplified application with a larger typeface.

DCF staff presented the scope of the program to supervisors in the local offices relatively late in the process (local office staff were not involved in earlier planning stages). Local supervisors suggested that it be limited to seniors applying for food stamps and not other programs (for example, Medicaid) since these applicants would still need to supply income and expenses documentation for non-FSP benefits. Despite this suggestion, the state still included all income-eligible seniors in the demonstration. Caseworkers reviewed the intake form and suggested that program planners remove unnecessary data fields for the elderly on the application (for example, age of children in household), which they did.

Once the state finalized its contract with Florida Impact, the organization developed outreach materials and Power Point presentations, and had the information cards and posters translated into Spanish. It also began developing text to be used for a radio public service announcements and newspaper advertisements. Finally, state officials trained local DCF staff one week before operations began.

Changes to the Design in Hindsight

After the simplified eligibility program was finished, DCF officials indicated that if they were to replicate it in other parts of Florida or continue its operation in Leon and Gadsden Counties, some adjustments would likely make the demonstration more effective. To begin with, program officials could create an official name for the pilot. In many cases, stakeholders and publicity materials avoided associating “food stamps” with the

demonstration because they worried that some seniors would refuse to apply. As a result, seniors did not know exactly what they were applying for and were confused when they called the local DCF office for more information. The lack of an official name might also explain why some community advocates and service providers seemed to be unfamiliar with the program.

In addition, since public education was a core component, officials thought it would have been useful to try and assess which outreach technique(s) were most effective at informing seniors about the simplified eligibility program. DCF easily could have added a question on the application (for example, *How did you hear about this program?*) and tracked this data, passing on the results to Florida Impact each quarter so that staff could adjust outreach efforts as necessary.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Limited transportation is one factor that may influence elderly participation rates in the FSP. Quincy, which is the town where seniors must apply for DCF social services in Gadsden County, does not have a public transportation system. The only option for residents is a private van service that charges \$5 to \$10 per one-way trip. Stakeholders have heard anecdotal accounts from seniors in both counties who pay friends or relatives \$10 or \$15 to drive them to the local county office to apply for food stamps or to recertify for benefits. Because the demonstration waived all face-to-face management reviews, seniors who encounter transportation barriers might find applying to the FSP under the simplified eligibility program particularly appealing.

PROBLEMS AND ISSUES THAT AROSE

The grantee encountered some challenges in implementing the elderly nutrition demonstration. In particular, communication gaps led to some frustration among local office staff. Also, county workers originally were concerned about how precise the benefit amounts would be if they were based on clients' self reporting, but ultimately this did not prove to be a concern. Likewise, while any senior applying for multiple DCF programs would still need to go through the trouble of supplying caseworkers with paperwork documenting their assets and expenses, this scenario only pertained to a small portion of demonstration clients. Each of these issues is discussed below.

Communication Gaps

Evidence suggests that communication among stakeholders was a problem, despite some efforts to share updated information with everyone. For example, local front-line staff did not know anything about the demonstration until the state received the grant, and some of them were surprised to learn during MPR's second site visit that the program was ending in December 2003. Indeed, some officials speculated that the PSA aired by the demonstration helped to raise awareness about the simplified rules among caseworkers. In addition, local DCF staff reported that they felt disconnected from Florida Impact's

outreach efforts. While this organization was the agency's sole community partner, caseworkers did not have a strong sense of their specific contributions.

However, Florida Impact staff noted in its quarterly reports that it regularly met with supervisors from each participating DCF service site to give updates on outreach activities and determine if staff needed additional application packets, information cards, and posters. The organization also mailed a letter to local staff explaining when the simplified eligibility program would end, but only some staff could recall this in a group interview.

Accuracy of Benefits Data

Initially, local DCF staff expressed reservations about the simplified eligibility model because applicants would not need to provide verification documentation. Caseworkers used existing internal databases to confirm their reported Social Security number, Social Security incomes, and Supplemental Security incomes. On the other hand, staff had to rely on the information provided by seniors regarding their assets and expenses. This raised staff concerns about possibly miscalculating benefit amounts if they could not double check the data given by the seniors. But by the end of the demonstration, DCF staff appeared no longer concerned that this added layer of quality control was waived for the pilot. Caseworkers anecdotally reported that the income data provided on applications matched the amounts recorded in the agency's databases, and reported rents generally coincided with market averages. Moreover, staff believed that the elderly were not likely to misrepresent their household assets and expenses.

Limiting Benefits of Demonstration to FSP-only Applicants

Any income-eligible senior could apply for food stamps using the modified rules under the demonstration. However, if seniors applied for other assistance programs at the same time, such as Medicaid or Supplemental Security Income, they still had to follow routine procedures for those programs. Since applicants would need to provide verification documentation and attend in-person interviews, the overall process of applying for social service programs was not simplified for this subgroup. Still, DCF thinks that only a small percentage of seniors submitted joint applications. Most of them were already enrolled in benefit programs like Social Security.

SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES

Florida's demonstration model resulted in two successful outcomes. The streamlining of the FSP application rules helped ease the workload of DCF staff by decreasing the amount of time that caseworkers need to spend on each applicant. The program also appealed to seniors since it made applying for food stamps less burdensome.

Reduced Workload for Caseworkers

One notable outcome of the simplified eligibility program is that caseworkers spent less time reviewing paperwork for new applicants and recertifications. Before operations began,

staff from Leon County spent 90 minutes on average processing an application, while the Gadsden caseworkers spent 75 minutes. When the waivers went into effect, time spent on each case dropped substantially—15 to 20 minutes per application in Leon and 25 minutes in Gadsden. Staff dedicated these time savings to other duties, such as processing non-FSP cases. Upon learning that the demonstration would end in December 2003, several workers expressed concern that their workloads would increase.

Addressed Common Barriers to FSP

Many stakeholders noted that the fundamental structure of the simplified eligibility program directly addressed some common barriers often associated with the elderly in applying to the FSP. Specifically, the demonstration's procedures eliminated much of the paperwork burden and the requirement of traveling to the DCF office for an in-person management review (potentially multiple trips) and for recertification interviews. By avoiding the need to see their caseworkers in person, seniors saved time and transportation costs, and could apply for food stamps from the privacy of their homes.

Figure II.1: Timeline of Outreach Activities for the Florida Simplified Eligibility Demonstration

	2002												2003											
Written materials	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
Application packets	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*				*	*	*	*	*	
Information cards	*	*	*	*	*																	*		
Posters	*	*	*	*	*																			
Transit system ads																								
Multi media																								
Radio PSA			*	*	*																			
Television PSA																								
News articles		*	*	*	*																			
TV news coverage																								
Press release																								
Networking																								
Presentations and meetings				**				*																
Public events			**																					

Source: 2002 and 2003 quarterly reports submitted by the Florida Department of Children and Families to the USDA Food and Nutrition Services.

*Alachua and Jackson Counties as well. ** Alachua County only.